

Changing Winds by Kendra Luehr

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Summary: When Billy awakens in the hospital, he immediately wishes he had died. A talk with a strange new friend changes that. (Billy & Eleven friendship, featuring Billy & Max closure.)

Changing Winds

A/N: In this AU, Billy never received that fatal blow through the heart. He was (very severely) drained. Hope you enjoy!

"Changing Winds"

As it turned out, being attacked by a mindflayer was no fucking picnic. Despite the fact he realistically *should* have died, a cruel (perhaps kind?) twist of fate had landed Billy Hargrove in the hospital.

After he had awoken, he'd been greeted by nothing but compassion and praise. It felt fucking *wrong*. He wasn't a hero. He didn't deserve to be lauded, least especially after the trail of bodies he'd left in his (albeit possessed) wake. For every "hero!" someone chanted, his father's overpowering "*fucking screw-up*" would take its place. He couldn't shake the self-hatred, and whenever Max's hopeful, tear-streaked face appeared at his bedside, he wanted to die.

"Hi," she whispered.

Swallowing, he managed a feeble smile before looking down at his clenched hands. He *hated* appearing weak. He wasn't going to cry, *he wasn't going to-*

"How are you feeling?"

"Like shit. You?"

"Same." Having a seat in the chair by his bedside, Max pulled it forward until they were close enough to touch. Appearing torn, she shifted a moment before admitting, "I almost didn't come."

"You shouldn't have." Ignoring the hurt in her eyes, he glowered up toward the ceiling.

She drew a breath. "For the longest time, I thought I hated you. But... I know now that I don't."

Slowly, Billy looked back over at her, a painful lump rising in his

throat. "Why not?"

"I dunno...I guess almost losing someone really puts things into perspective."

"But I was an asshole..."

"You *are* an asshole," Max corrected, laughing amidst her tears, "but I don't hate you. Not anymore." Hesitant, she laid her hand down over his and squeezed. "I wanted to apologize, you know...for never helping when I could have."

"Oh, for fuck's sake, Max..."

"No, hear me out." Her eyes were earnest and pleading. "For a while there, I really thought you were like dad – that you were going to like...*become* him, or something, because any time you hit or spit or cussed at me, you were cruel and abusive, and it was like gazing into his eyes. But...there's *one* big difference between the two of you."

Billy appeared unimpressed. "Yeah? And what's that?"

"You remembered who you are – who you *really* are – and tried to do a good thing. I think dad's too far gone to be anything other than a monster."

Billy swallowed, but he chose to say nothing.

Discomfited, Max looked away. "Any time dad yelled at you, I could've tried and stopped him, but I didn't... And I'm sorry."

"Better me than you," he muttered. "Don't be stupid, Max."

"Do you really think we've changed? Do you think we could actually be...y'know...friends, or something?"

Finally, there was a slight pressure on her hand, and Max looked down to see Billy weakly squeezing her fingers. He didn't speak, but she knew it was as good an answer as she was going to get. She beamed. "You actually have another visitor...she's been waiting outside."

Confused, Billy opened his mouth to speak when someone entered the doorway. Almost appearing timid, the girl from Starcourt – *Eleven?* – stepped forward, anxiously twisting her hands in front of a bright, neon print shirt. The vibrant colors hurt his eyes. Blinking them in annoyance, he looked away just in time for Max to make her leave. She whispered something reassuring to Eleven, then continued out into the hallway.

"Hi."

Billy snorted in greeting.

With a frown, Eleven continued twisting her hands as she edged further into the room. "Do you remember me?" The garnered eye-roll assured her that yes, he *did* remember her, and with a soft sigh, she sank down onto the bed at his side.

"What do you want?"

"To talk."

Scowling at the evasiveness, Billy scratched at one of his bandages and eyed her severely. "So, is 'speaking in riddles' part of your powers, or...?"

She laid a hand against his cheek, just as she'd done at the mall, and he promptly shunted from her touch. Long ago, he'd learned that spontaneous touch could be a double-edged sword – that it could be *dangerous*.

"Honey, don't – the boy just wants attention!"

"Attention? I'll show him attention!"

"Your dad beats you."

"Yeah, no shit." Rolling his eyes, Billy shifted with a grimace of pain. "I mean what, do you want a medal or something? Being able to see my memories is nothing to be proud of...Eleven, right?" He snorted. "What kind of name is Eleven, anyway? It's fucking stupid, that's what."

"You're hurt...so you want me to hurt too. Is that right?"

Billy appeared alarmed.

"Friends don't hurt friends."

He huffed. "You're not my friend."

"No, but I can be...if you'll let me."

"That's what you came here for? To spout a bunch of "kumbaya" bullshit and shoot rainbows out your ass?"

Slowly withdrawing her hand from his face, Eleven leaned back and regarded him evenly. "You saved my life, and I wanted to thank you."

"I didn't do it for you. I did it for me."

"I know... And that's what I was hoping for. You'd been holding yourself back for a long time, and there was one more monster that you had to defeat."

Billy laughed then, low and husky. "This must be a dream," he declared. "What are you, a priest? I feel like I'm in a fucking confessional."

"Not with that mouth."

He laughed again, shrugging. "Guilty as charged."

Silence encompassed them then, soft and (surprisingly) easy, until Eleven touched him again. This time, he let her.

"Not all memories have to be bad," she whispered.

With a sharp, painful burning sensation in his chest, Billy found that he could only nod as tears welled up in his eyes. *Weak. You're so fucking weak, you're-*

"Strong."

"What?"

"You're strong," she murmured. "After what happened to me – to my...my *dad*... I hope I can be that way too."

"You will." The words were out before he could stop them, and Billy instantly felt foolish. He wasn't the type for pep talks or positivity bullshit, but something about her was inspiring. He knew she'd be fine.

With a tearful smile, Eleven nodded. "I should go now."

"Yeah."

"Can I...maybe come back again sometime?"

"Do you actually *want* to?"

Again, she nodded, and Billy regarded her in disbelief. "Your funeral," he quipped, "but sure...that'd be okay."

"Okay." Rising from her perch, Eleven took his hand. "Thank you for talking with me."

"Yeah, likewise... I think. Same time tomorrow?"

She grinned, showing off a crooked, girlish smile that oddly touched his heart.

A/N: I wrote this because A) I love closure for characters (and Max/Billy definitely deserved closure, especially on Max's end), and B) I thought an aftermath talk between Billy and Eleven would be really interesting. What's even more interesting is I never really liked Billy, but somehow, this idea wouldn't leave me alone, and now I have an odd kind of fondness for him (or at least, of what *could* have been). I'm sad he never got a true redemption arc, because we never really got to see into his head during S3, aside from a few flashbacks. Anyway, I hope you all enjoyed! Comments are love!